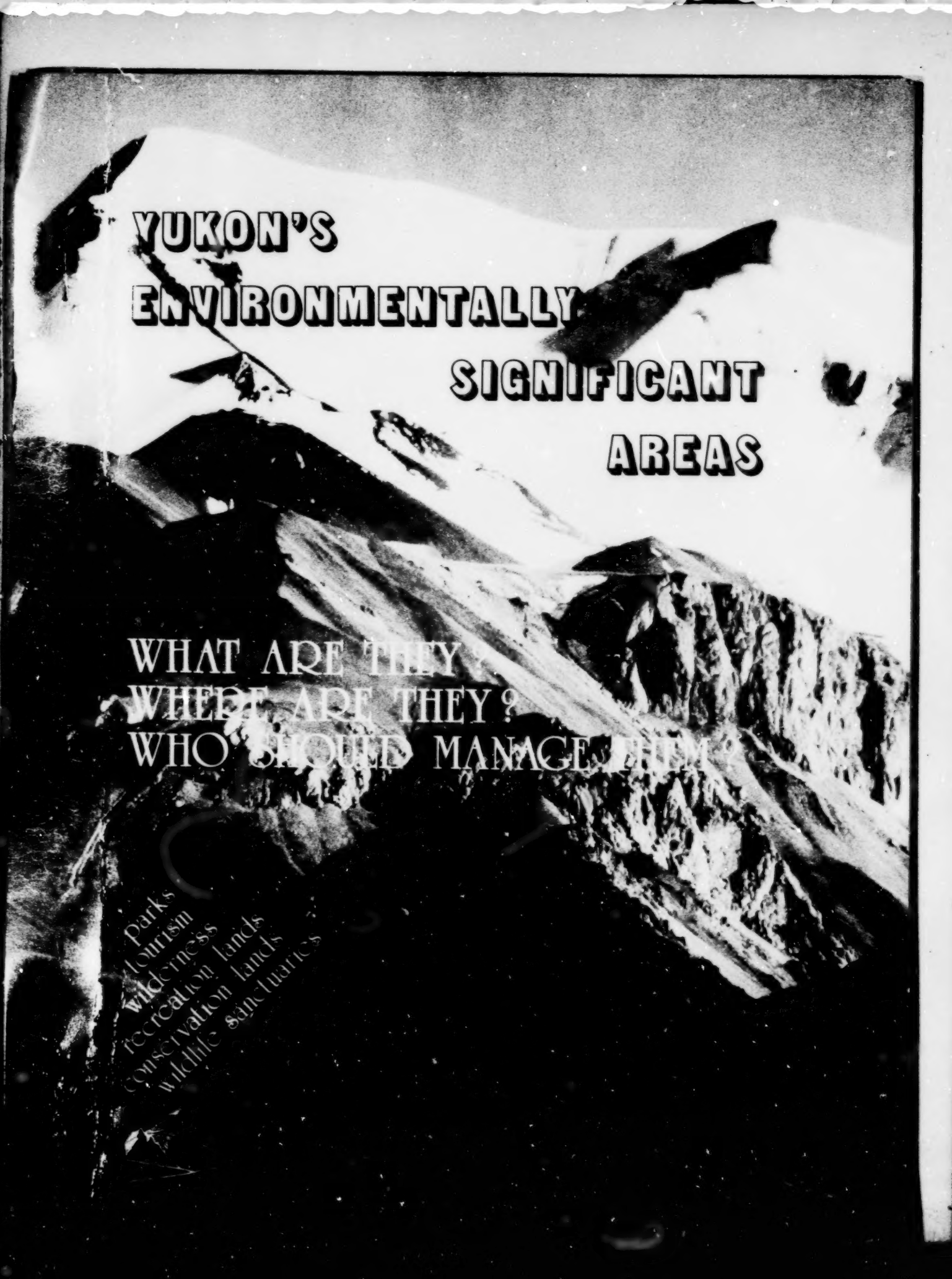

YUKON'S
ENVIRONMENTALLY
SIGNIFICANT
AREAS
WHAT ARE THEY?
WHERE ARE THEY?
WHO SHOULD MANAGE THEM?
parks
tourism
wilderness
recreation lands
conservation lands
wildlife sanctuaries

YUKON'S ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT AREAS

What Are They?

The Yukon Territory has within its boundaries Canadian wilderness lands of great beauty and value. Many of these lands are truly of national significance, such as the calving and wintering areas of the huge Porcupine caribou herd. Other lands have wildland recreational and tourist value of great significance to Yukoners and the Yukon economy. These lands, and their wildlife are, however, under great threat from petroleum, hydroelectric and other mega projects, as well as the incremental effects of mining roads, and other smaller developments. If the values of these wildlands are to accrue to Canadians and Yukoners, the lands must be identified immediately and placed under sound management to protect their features.

Resource surveys in the Yukon by many government agencies and university research over the past 40 years have made it possible to identify the most significant wildlands based upon ecological values: concentrations of caribou, Dall sheep, large mammal and bird predators, waterfowl and furbearers; the rare flora; the significant landforms and geological features. These wildland values represent a unique and most valuable recreational, educational, economic and scientific heritage.

Where Are They?

Thirty-five "environmentally significant areas" have been identified in the Yukon, representing 128,865 km^2 (49,737 mi^2) or about 26% of the territory (see map). Of this total, 33,282 km^2 (12,850 mi^2) are already under some degree of protection: 22,015 km^2 (8,500 mi^2) is in Kluane National Park, while the remainder is in the McArthur and Kluane game sanctuaries and the Peel River and Fishing Branch River game preserves.

Most of the remaining 95,583 Km^2 (36,895 mi^2) has been identified as significant for protection by a variety of government agencies, such as the 38,700 km^2 (15,000 mi^2) northern Yukon land withdrawal made by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and proposed territorial parks a..d wildlife preserves and ecological reserves.

Fourteen of the 35 areas are larger than 2,000 km^2 (772 mi^2). Much of the value of northern wilderness lies in its relatively undisturbed character as reflected in the existence of large, self-regulating ecosystems. The size of these ecosystems is significant and must be appreciated by those interested in their protection. For example, the key caribou herd - the Porcupine - roams over hundreds of thousands of square miles during its annual life cycle. This herd calves along the northern Arctic coast and winters far to the south in parts of Alaska and the central Yukon. The herd has adopted a migratory strategy to meet its ecological needs. In other words, the caribou require unusually large areas in order to survive. Similarly, Dall sheep move from one traditional range to another throughout each season. A single wolf pack requires territories often in excess of 1,500 km^2 (575 mi^2), and young grizzlies often travel hundreds of kilometres. If parks and other types of reserve are to serve the needs of northern wildlife, they must include thousands of square kilometres - a scale that seems excessive to southerners, but reflects the biological reality of the Yukon and the North.

Regulation of hunting and trapping of animals cannot ensure their survival if the very habitat upon which they depend is destroyed. "Habitat" includes all of the ecosystem: rock, soil, plants, and man. As a result, the protection of any one part of an ecosystem (be it a rare plant, wolf,

caribou, or fish) requires the management of other components of that ecosystem. Environmental preservation in the Yukon must therefore be pursued with an awareness of the need for large, relatively undisturbed areas of habitat.

The areas identified on the map are general only. Detailed resource surveys are currently underway in some of the areas (Frances Lake, Kluane North, Carcross, Aishihik, Keele Peak), to outline more specifically the natural values as well as the human cultural values (present and past land uses) in order to identify more precise boundaries, and management requirements, and to minimize conflicts with mining or other land uses.

One area may be most suitable as a national park or landmark, another as a national wildlife area, or a Yukon Territorial Park, or a set of small ecological reserves within a carefully managed human-use area, depending upon the reasons for its protection.

Techniques of resource inventory have been developed specifically for evaluating these areas. These techniques can provide sufficient data for planning any one area within months.

Why Protection is Needed

The Yukon Territory has historically suffered from a "frontier mentality". Partly because of this and also due to the remoteness of government, environmental protection has been slow in arriving. Unfortunately, some wildlife species have declined and much wilderness has been marred. Incremental loss of wildlands is insidious, for any one development is not preceived as serious enough to generate much concern. Viewed in their totality, however, incremental losses soon alter the whole character of the land. Much of the Yukon is already accessible by way of roads and tote trails, or is serviced by airstrips.

It has been suggested that some current land use projects will bring development on a much larger scale. An obvious example is the Dempster Highway, which traverses the remote and otherwise roadless terrain between Dawson in the Yukon and Fort McPherson in the Northwest Territories. This road will open more than 129,500 km^2 (50,000 mi^2) of the Yukon to mining and other projects. Another example is the multi-billion-dollar Alaska Highway natural gas pipeline proposal, which may be built across more than 800 km. (500 mi.) of the southern Yukon. Much of this area has already been disturbed by the Alaska Highway and urban, mining, and other development. The Alaska Highway gas pipeline, however, could trigger an array of other projects in more remote areas. For example, another pipeline may be built from potential oil and gas fields in the Beaufort Sea and western Arctic along the Dempster Highway to link with the Alaska pipeline project. Hydro-electric dams, reservoirs, and roads are also being planned in order to provide power for the compressor stations and other facilities along the Alaska Highway gas pipeline.

Placer gold mining has reached recent historic highs in amounts of land claimed or leased, resulting in tote road-building at an extensive scale all over the southern 2/3 of the Territory. Unlike British Columbia which designates areas where mining exploration may and may not be undertaken, the Yukon is wide open except for federally-designated prohibitions in one national park and one national park reserve. Claims staked under the Yukon Quartz Mining and Placer Mining Acts do not even require land-use permits for environmental protection.

All these existing and proposed developments, unless carefully planned and regulated could deal a major and perhaps irreversible blow to the Yukon's wildland resources and to local people who are dependent upon them for both a livlihood and a way of life. Designating some lands

beyond the reach of development is an important component of responsible land-use planning in both the national and local interests.

What About Conflicting Uses?

Hunting, fishing, and trapping. Subsistence taking of wildlife by local human populations, is compatible with objectives of protecting ecological values if carefully regulated. The most acceptable level of use would be that which ensures a long-term sustained yield in terms of both quality and quantity. Sport and commercial taking of fish and wildlife may vary in its acceptability depending upon the eventual management agency for any one area. Generally, these issues will have to be resolved on a site-by-site basis. To arbitrarily submit a broad spectrum of land to the same styles and levels of subsistence hunting, trapping and fishing would be to ignore the complexity and variability of areas. Only by careful analysis of the wildlife populations, habitat conditions, and needs of indigenous human populations in and around each area can rational harvesting policies be developed. Some areas will support hunting and others where this activity is more strictly controlled will still contribute to opportunities on adjacent lands.

Mining

Resource and human use surveys will attempt to reduce conflicts with mining on a site-to-site basis through proposed boundary adjustments. Maps of minerally-significant areas in the Yukon have been prepared by geologists, and suggest that a system of parks, wildlife sanctuaries and other special management areas can indeed be established to protect Yukon wildlands without significant detriment to the mining industry in the Yukon.

Regarding placer gold mining, almost all of the present activity is on creeks known to have gold deposits from previous operations. This fact makes it practical to designate creeks with potential from those without

potential, and again plan parks and reserves to minimize conflicts.

Those environmentally significant areas designated for wilderness use should however, remain roadless by necessity in any definition of wilderness, just as they are in the United States under the Wilderness Act. Such land is not allocated to "single" rather than "multiple" use, since they may cater to backpacking and climbing, subsistence hunting, fishing, non-disruptive forms of scientific use, wildlife and other photography, and in some cases resident and commercial wildlife trapping and hunting.

Native Claims, Federal Control, Territorial Control

The underlying premise of the identification of environmentally significant areas is that the land be managed to protect its values, regardless of who does that management. Some of the areas are of undoubted interest to native people, and if they eventually control these lands, they should manage them in a way that reflects what they are: the most significant wildlands in the Yukon. The same reasoning applies to often heated conflict over federal versus territorial control of land and resources: which ever level of government has at present or assumes responsibility for each of these areas in the future, they must be appropriately managed.

Will These Lands Be Protected?

The establishment of a system of lands designated as parks and various types of reserves, to protect the Yukon wildlands heritage, is not assured. On the positive side is increasing concern by Canadians, including many in the south, that our wilderness heritage, so much a part of our history and art and literature and identity, be protected. Many southerners suggest that it is legitimate for them to have such aspirations for some northern lands, just as northerners have aspirations, or expect land in the south to provide them with the material well-being of, food and a vast array of manufactured goods. As well, among Yukoners are many who live in the

Yukon rather than in the south, because of the nearness to wilderness. On the positive side, too, are efforts to resolve native land claims, which, if handled responsibly by all parties concerned, should result in land-use planning -- the identification of goals, life-style options and other aspects of human well-being.

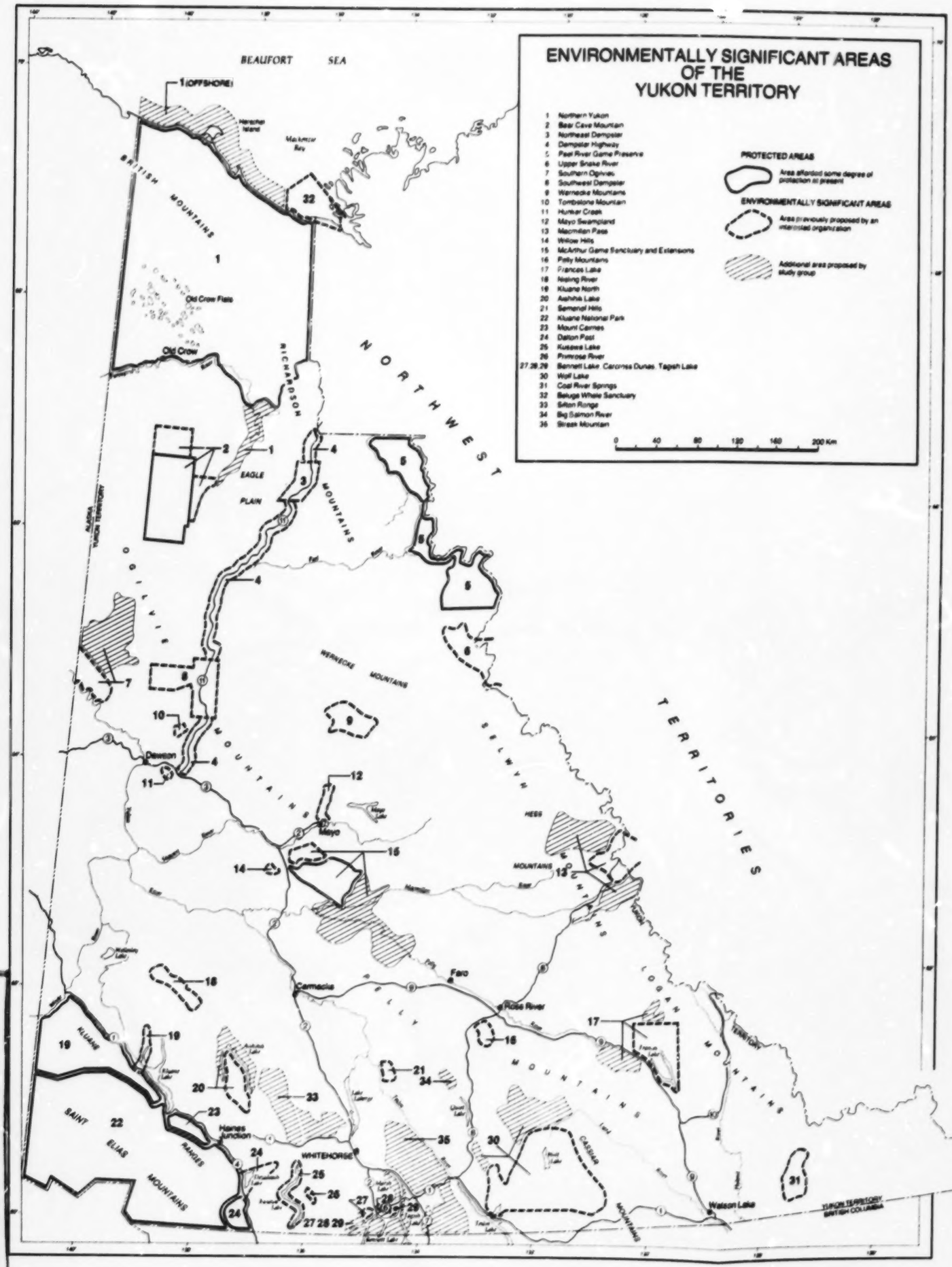
On the negative side are the dominant political forces supporting uncontrolled economic opportunism which has scarcely been channelled in the north, by either territorial or federal governments, and jurisdictional conflicts between the two levels of government. There must be significantly greater recognition of a plurality of values in the Yukon, that land managed for its wildland values adds an essential quality to a northern lifestyle, diversifies the economic base with tourism potential, and perpetuates a heritage. More attention is needed on the renewable and aesthetic resources. Until a governmental policy shift both federally and territorially brings about this approach to more balanced development, the values of these wildlands continue to be lost.

A role of catalyst to bring about the protection of environmentally significant wildlands in the Yukon is being played by a group of researchers at the University of Waterloo, who have worked extensively and for many years in the Yukon. Support-in-principle for the idea of coordinated planning for protective management of significant areas comes from some branches in both federal and territorial governments, and many conservation organizations including Canadian Arctic Resources Committee and Yukon Conservation Society. Research funding has been supplied by a private foundation (Donner)and the World Wildlife Fund (Canada).

Some branches of both the territorial and federal governments are responding to their responsibilities under a variety of acts to preserve and

protect representatives of Yukon wildlands. The territorial government's parks branch is promoting park status for some of the environmentally significant areas (Kusawa Lake, Herschel Island, Coal River Springs). Parks Canada is studying the northern Yukon and is interested in candidate lands for a park in eastern Yukon. The Canadian Wildlife Service is researching a series of bird sanctuaries throughout the territory.

However, governments do not work in isolation: they must be urged forward by prevailing public attitudes. The intent of this pamphlet is primarily to inform more Yukoners and other Canadians of the need for <u>their</u> support for the protection of this Yukon heritage. We encourage your response by letter urging the establishment of parks, reserves and other protective measures to the leader of the territorial government (C. Pearson) and/or to the Yukon M.P. (E. Neilsen). More information is available on individual areas in the publication "Yukon Environmentally Significant Areas," available from Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, 40 Elgin Street, Ottawa, K1P 5K6. Price $6.00. The researchers involved would also like to hear your response, and answer further questions. Write: Yukon Environmentally Significant Areas, General Delivery, Destruction Bay, Y0B 1H0, or Faculty of Environmental Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1.


ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT AREAS
OF THE
YUKON TERRITORY
1 Northern Yukon
2 Bear Cave Mountain
3 Northeast Dempster
4 Dempster Highway
5 Peel River Game Preserve
6 Upper Snake River
7 Southern Ogilvies
8 Southwest Dempster
9 Wernecke Mountains
10 Tombstone Mountain
11 Hunker Creek
12 Mayo Swampland
13 Macmillan Pass
14 Willow Hills
15 McArthur Game Sanctuary and Extensions
16 Pelly Mountains
17 Frances Lake
18 Nisling River
19 Kluane North
20 Aishihik Lake
21 Semenof Hills
22 Kluane National Park
23 Mount Cermes
24 Dalton Post
25 Kusawa Lake
26 Primrose River
27,28,29 Bennett Lake Carcross Dunes, Tagish Lake
30 Wolf Lake
31 Coal River Springs
32 Beluga Whale Sanctuary
33 Sifton Range
34 Big Salmon River
35 Stress Mountain
PROTECTED AREAS
Area afforded some degree of protection at present
ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT AREAS
Area previously proposed by an interested organization
Additional area proposed by study group
0 40 80 120 160 200 Km
BEAUFORT SEA
1 (OFFSHORE)
BRITISH MOUNTAINS
Old Crow Flats
Old Crow
RICHARDSON
EAGLE PLAIN
OGILVIE MOUNTAINS
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
WERNECKE MOUNTAINS
SELWYN MOUNTAINS
Dawson
Mayo
Carmacks
Faro
Ross River
PELLY MOUNTAINS
LOGAN MOUNTAINS
CASSIAR MOUNTAINS
KLUANE RANGES
SAINT ELIAS MOUNTAINS
Haines Junction
WHITEHORSE
Watson Lake
YUKON TERRITORY
BRITISH COLUMBIA